

VZCZCXRO6874
OO RUEHBW RUEHIK RUEHPW RUEHYG
DE RUEHBUL #1008 1151235
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 241235Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3679
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

UNCLAS KABUL 001008

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A,
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR WOOD
OSD FOR SHIVERS
CENTCOM FOR CG CJTF-82 POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: ETHNIC DISPUTE PROMPTS PROTRACTED PARLIAMENTARY
WALKOUT

11. (U) Summary: Angry non-Pashtun MPs walked out of the National Assembly's lower house April 12, protesting the centuries old seasonal Pashtun Kochi migration though the Hazarajat and the nomads' 10 reserved parliamentary seats. The lower house has not made quorum since, stalling consideration of the election law, which would govern lower house seat reservations. House Speaker Qanooni is mediating between the two sides. Even with the presidential elections more than a year away, Karzai and the opposition United Front are already bidding for ethnic vote blocs, including the Hazara, which is in play here. Competition over the Hazarajat's grazing lands last year led to violence between sedentary Hazaras and Kochi herdsmen.

12. (U) The early spring return of nomadic Pashtun Kochi herdsmen to the predominantly Hazara Bihsud district of Wardak province sparked protests March 30 by hundreds of Hazaras in Kabul. The angry Hazaras warned they would violently resist the centuries old seasonal Kochi migration. Afghanistan's grazing land has not recovered from the six-year drought that ended a year ago. The sedentary Hazaras, also cattle herders, compete with the Kochis for grazing land. Bihsud was the site of Hazara-Kochi violence in July 2007, which reportedly left 11 people dead.

13. (SBU) The possibility of renewed Kochi-Hazara violence poisoned the April 12 lower house discussion of the already contentious election law bill, which would set the date for presidential and parliamentary elections and reaffirm the reservation for Kochis of 10 lower house seats elected from a nation-wide constituency. Non-Pashtuns resent the reservation, which they see as reinforcing Pashtun hegemony. The plenary session devolved into ethnic slur-slinging. Two MPs known for their mutual personal animosity traded insults in the chamber. Alam Gul Kochi (Kochi, Khost) claimed Kochis are "the only true Afghans." He derided non-Pashtun Afghans as "refugees." Mohammad Hussain Fahimi (Hazara, Sar-e-Pul), in turn, smeared Pashtuns. In a mistaken effort to advance the bill, First Deputy Speaker Mir Wais Yaseni called for a separate vote on the Kochi reservation article. This caused 90 mostly non-Pashtun members to break quorum by walking out of the chamber; they have not returned. Lower house Speaker Qanooni has launched a mediation effort that seeks to lure

the striking MPs back by temporarily removing the election law bill from the docket.

¶4. (SBU) The dispute presents the opposition United Front with an opportunity to secure the Hazara ethnic voting bloc, which comprised 10 percent of the 2004 electorate. According to the exclusively Hazara Wahdat Party's foreign relations advisor, Abdul Ali Azad, Qanooni is exploiting his mediation effort to forge an alliance with Hazaras by emphasizing Karzai's failure to protect their lands from Kochi "incursions." MPs Engineer Mohammad Asim (Tajik, Baghlan) and Shakar Kargar (Uzbek, Jawzjan) contend Karzai is disadvantaged in his bid for the Hazaras because he is compelled to reinforce his core Pashtun support by backing the Kochis.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Karzai confronts a dilemma. He needs to shore up his Pashtun base; supporting the Kochi lower house seat reservation serves that end. At the same time, he would dearly love to win the Hazara vote. That emerging bloc, coupled with the 40 percent of the electorate who are Pashtun, might give him the majority he needs to win the presidential election in the first round. So far, he has not asserted a profile in this inter-ethnic dispute. He may have to do so soon to prevent the Hazaras from inclining towards a United Front that has made an early dramatic bid for their support.
WOOD